W.S. Holt

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in Alaska

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BEGINNING OF MISSION WORK IN ALASKA

BY
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BEGINNING OF MISSION WORK IN ALASKA BY THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

It is for the interest of true history that our Church should be clear as to the beginning of any of its Mission enterprises. Promoters of Missions pass away. Early workers complete their labor. Private correspondence from which much information could be gained is destroyed. Erroneous statements arise, and by and by are taken for the truth. Then when some one wishes to write history, unwittingly the work of some devoted laborer and friend is overlooked and a part of the truth is lost. We are near the sources of information about Alaska now. There are men and women living who know when our Church began its work for Alaska and how. My own interest in the Mission work of our Church wherever carried, has caused friends to place at my disposal missionary correspondence of one of our most honored ministers on this Coast. I have taken great pleasure in tracing this man's interest in Alaska through many years. The Presbyterian Church is indebted to the late Rev. A. L. Lindsley, D. D., pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Portland, Oregon, for eighteen years, for opening mission work in Alaska.

Dr. Lindsley became pastor of the First Church, Portland, Oregon, in 1868. Secretary Seward visited Alaska in 1869, after the purchase. When he returned Dr. Lindsley was in Victoria, B. C. He had an interview with Mr. Seward in which he sought and obtained such information as a man of Mr. Seward's knowledge and judgment could give concerning the general condition of the natives of Alaska. Already the mind of the minister saw in Alaska a field for evangelistic effort. From this time until he was taken from earthly scenes his interest in that country continued, and he left no means untried to introduce the Gospel to that part of our land. His hands were full in his own field. He was alert to the growing needs of the white people on the coast. But he could always take time to consult the needs of the Indians of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska. His letters to the Boards of Home and Foreign Missions and to individuals are full of thought and care for the aborigines who learned to know that he was their true friend. As concerns Alaska, Dr. Lindsley used every opportunity to complete his own knowledge of the country and people, corresponding with or visiting those who had been in the country whether as

Government officials or travelers, and hoping for the day when work should be begun.

In 1875, General O. O. Howard came to Portland from Alaska, all on fire with zeal for Mission work. In a personal interview with General Howard on March 4th of 1895, he said, "I suppose I talked with Dr. Lindsley twenty times in 1875 about opening Missions in Alaska. I lived across the street from him and Alaska was a frequent subject for conversation."

As a result of General Howard's interest, Rev. E. P. Hammond and wife, who were on this coast as evangelists, made a visit to Fort Wrangel and Sitka in 1875. Mr. Hammond was undoubtedly the first American minister to visit Alaska in the interest of Mission work. He himself says they had two objects in view. 1—To preach the gospel for a short time. 2—To get acquainted with the natives and urge their need of Missionaries.

Dr. Lindsley naturally in his missionary correspondence with the Home and Foreign Boards urged repeatedly the claims of the Alaskans. At the same time, determined that something should be done, he began to look for a man to go to the field. The Wesleyans were at work at Fort Simpson in British Columbia and were meeting with success. Why should not equal success follow efforts made among our own Indians? A memorial to the General Assembly prepared by Dr. Lindsley and authorized by the Synod in 1876, was sent forward to the Commissioner. But it was never presented.

In May of 1877, Mr. J. C. Mallory, a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Portland was sent up to Alaska by Dr. Lindsley. The object of the trip was to visit Fort Wrangel and Sitka with a view to Missionary effort. Mr. Mallory found at Fort Wrangel a Christian Indian, who had been trained by the Wesleyans. He employed him to carry on a school. The rent of school room and salary of the teacher were assumed in Dr. Lindsley's name.

In a letter to the Home Board, bearing date of July 27, 1877, Dr. Lindsley rehearsed the fact of Mr. Mallory's visit, his hearty reception by whites and Indians, the employment of the Christian Indian to teach, the projection of a Church building, the promise of money from natives toward a building fund, the great need of books, the appointment of Mr. Mallory to an Indian agency in another part of the country, which his health compelled him to accept, the urgent need for a successor, without delay, and the formal application for the appointment of the Indian teacher, Philip

Simpsian (or Mackay, as he was commonly called), at a salary of $25 per month.

His correspondence at this time with brethren in the Synod, Rev. Dr. Geary and Rev. H. W. Stratton, are burdened with the Alaskan work and recount the steps above, as already taken.

A successor to Mr. J. C. Mallory was found here in Portland in the person of Mrs. McFarland, now so well and favorably known because of her successful work in the Alaskan field. She was a member of Dr. Lindsley's church. She was a minister's widow. She was glad to do missionary work. Dr. Lindsley wanted just such a laborer and promptly became responsible for the expense of her going and for her support. On the 30th of July, Dr. Lindsley addressed the Home Board informing the Secretary of the decision to employ Mrs. McFarland and asked for her an open commission. The letter closes with these words, "I have watched Alaska ever since we owned it and believe God is guiding."

In a letter to the late Rev. E. R. Geary, D. D., written Aug. 6, 1877, occurs this passage, "Mrs. McFarland is ready to take hold of the work. Already I have advanced her $200 of my own funds."

On the 18th of August, 1877, Dr. Lindsley wrote to Dr. Lowrie, Secretary of the Foreign Board, as follows: "The work in Alaska was begun in the belief that American Christians would sustain it. This grew out of encouragement given by myself and General Howard that we would do something for Alaska. Mr. Mallory took possession of what was thus found to his hand. He hired Philip Simpsian, the teacher, for three months. He made me responsible for all and I had no desire to go back on it. Nay, I accepted the charge as the will of God and we could not pause.

"It seems to me plainly the dictates of Providence that we should take charge of this Mission. It stands in my name as I have assumed its support. I apply to you and to the Board of Home Missions to take it off my hands."

A letter dated September 7, 1877, addressed to Drs. Kendall and Dickson says, "My conferences with Dr. Jackson and Mr. Mallory led me to invite Dr. Jackson to reconnoitre the Alaska ground, Mr. Mallory having decided to accept the agency of the Colorado Indians. This was done in my name. I have already adavnced $190 and am responsible for a similar amount in addition, to Mrs. McFarland."

Dr. Lindsley's urgency for a missionary who could preach the Gospel was re-inforced by his missionary teacher, Mrs. McFarland. She writes from Fort Wrangel, September 13, 1877, "I am

very much interested in my school and am kept very busy. The people here are exceedingly anxious for a minister to come. I have had several chiefs and prominent men to see me and all ask 'how many moons till the white man preacher comes?' "

September 28, 1877, a letter was sent to Dr. Dickson of the Home Board, saying, "Several ministers have addressed me about the Alaska field. I pray the Lord send us a man for Wrangel. There is an 'abundant entrance.' " That Dr. Lindsley also continued his financial aid as well as spiritual interest is shown in a communication to Mrs. McFarland, dated October 8, 1877, forwarding her $100 and saying, "I shall feel hurt if you do not let me know what you want which I can supply. Thank God that you are in this work."

About this time there is evidence that the good Doctor's reiterated desire to have the Board assume the work in Alaska was soon to be realized. October 20, 1877, he writes Dr. Dickson acknowledging "$500 for Mrs. McFarland and Philip Mackay and will report thereon according to directions." He continues "both the Presbytery of Oregon and Synod of the Columbia very heartily endorse the action which I had taken concerning the Alaska mis sion." In the letter from Dr. Dickson above referred to are found these words, "We most cordially assume the Alaska work." This is what Dr. Lindsley had always hoped and urged. It was at once approval of what he had done and a guarantee of the continuance of the efforts of years. But some time elapsed before the Home Board came into control.

On November 9, 1877, he once more writes the Home Board, "The Alaska Mission looms up again. The people of Sitka are praying for schools and ministers. The U. S. Collector applies to me for teachers. He promises school room and house rent and pecuniary aid. There are 2500 Indians in and near Sitka and 250 whites and half breeds. No church or minister (except occasional services by a Russian priest) no school or teacher; little or nothing to distinguish the population from a heathen race. I am now writing to a well qualified Christian lady in the hope that she will go to Sitka to teach." From this time there is an extended correspondence with the Collector, with the lady above referred to, who is Mrs. S. Hall Young, nee Kellogg, and her friends, with Senators and Congressmen, and with the President of the United States,— in all seeking the welfare of the Indians, and the guarantee of protection to those who might enter upon the field.

In November he writes to the Home Board Secretary, "The need of an ordained minister for Alaska is very great . . . . Poor

Alaska stands pleading at the door of our church; God is offering the glory of her redemption to us. Is there no devoted and competent missionary to heed the call?"

December 1, 1877, replying to a letter from Mrs. McFarland he says, "You are yourself as teacher, an answer to many prayers. Do not be discouraged at the delay of missionary help. I sometimes feel impatient. It rebukes me to reflect that the cause is God's and that I had waited long before Mr. Mallory appeared, and you were released from all other engagements that you might undertake these self-denying labors."

Early in 1878 came the formal control of the Home Board over the Alaska field. Dr. Lindsley gladly yields up the charge and February 4th writes Mrs. McFarland, "Here is your commission and directions. Henceforth you will report to the Board." . . . . . In the same letter which bore Mrs. McFarland's commission to her went the cheering intelligence that "Rev. J. G. Brady has been appointed missionary to Alaska by our Board." Dr. Lindsley learned this from a telegram from New Fork, dated January 31st, announcing the commission of Mr. Brady and the appointment of Miss Fanny Kellogg as a teacher for Sitka.

Our sketch would hardly be complete without a momentary reference, in closing, to Dr. Lindsley's subsequent visit to Alaska commissioned by the Board of Home Missions and the Presbytery of Oregon to organize the first Protestant church in that territory. Drs. Kendall and Jackson, who were then making the Alaska tour, assisted at this service.

William Sylvester Holt.

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